

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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R 291934Z MAY 74

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9505

INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

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AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, FR

SUBJECT: MICHEL PONIATOWSKI, MINISTER OF INTERIOR

1. SUMMARY: THE NEW INTERIOR MINISTER IS GISCARD'S CLOSEST POLITICAL CONFIDANT AND RIGHT ARM, AND A MAJOR ARCHITECT OF GISCARD'S VICTORY IN THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN. THE ONLY ONE OF GISCARD'S FIFTEEN MINISTERS TO BE GIVEN THE PRESTIGIOUS TITLE OF "MINISTER OF STATE", PONIATOWSKI IS CLEARLY THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PERSON IN THE CABINET AS WELL AS ITS RANKING MEMBER. END SUMMARY.

2. MICHEL PONIATOWSKI, 52, IS THE FORMER MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY AND FORMER SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN (IR) PARTY. PONIATOWSKI IS THE HEIR TO A FAMILY OF GREAT WEALTH WHICH, SINCE BEFORE THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, HAS BEEN

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IMPORTANT IN EUROPEAN POLITICS (AN EARLIER PONIATOWSKI

WAS KING OF POLAND, ANOTHER EARNED HIS FIELD-MARSHAL'S BATON UNDER FRANZ-JOSEF OF AUSTRIA, AND ANOTHER WAS A NAPOLEONIC MARSHAL). "PONIA" (AS HE IS CALLED BY POLITICAL INTIMATES AND HEADLINE WRITERS) IS GISCARD'S GOOD RIGHT ARM, CLOSEST POLITICAL CONFIDANT AND THE NEW PRESIDENT'S CHIEF HATCHET MAN. TO OUR KNOWLEDGE HE IS GISCARD'S ONLY CONFIDANT PRIVY TO THE PRESIDENT'S MOST PRIVATE POLITICAL MUSINGS (IT IS SAID THAT PONIATOWSKI IS THE ONLY PERSON IN THE GOVERNMENT WHO CAN FREELY TELEPHONE GISCARD AT ANY HOUR OF THE DAY OR NIGHT). HE IS LIKELY TO BE CHARGED WITH THE POLITICALLY SENSITIVE TASK OF OVERSEEING THE REDRAWING OF ELECTORAL DISTRICTS FOR THE NEXT LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. PONIATOWSKI IS AN OUTSPOKEN ANTI-COMMUNIST AND HIS APPOINTMENT AS INTERIOR MINISTER PROBABLY WILL BE WELL RECEIVED BY THE INTERNAL SECURITY SERVICES (DST & RG).

3. WITH THREE INTERRUPTIONS -- TWO TOURS IN MOROCCO (1949-52 AND 1958) AND ONE AS FINANCIAL ATTACHE IN WASHINGTON (1956) -- PONIATOWSKI HAS SPENT 20 OF THE 25 YEARS SINCE HIS GRADUATION FROM THE NATIONAL SCHOOL OF ADMINISTRATION (1948) WORKING IN THE FINANCE MINISTRY IN PARIS. HE WAS NAMED DIRECTEUR DU CABINET FOR GISCARD WHEN THE LATTER WAS FIRST APPOINTED SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FINANCE IN 1959. PONIATOWSKI CONTINUED IN THIS POSITION AFTER GISCARD WAS NAMED MINISTER IN JANUARY 1962. FROM 1962 THROUGH 1965, HE WAS CHARGE DE MISSION IN GISCARD'S CABINET, ACTING AS SENIOR STAFF ADVISOR. IN 1965, GISCARD REWARDED HIM BY APPOINTING HIM DIRECTOR OF INSURANCE, A POST WHICH HE HELD UNTIL 1967. THUS, GISCARD KEPT PONIATOWSKI WITH HIM AT THE MINISTRY BETWEEN 1962-67, BY GIVING HIM IMPORTANT POSTS AND BY LETTING "THE PRINCE" SERVE AS A SPOKESMAN WHO MADE STATEMENTS WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOLITIC OF GISCARD HIMSELF TO MAKE.

4. FIRST ELECTED TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN 1967 FROM THE VAL-D'OISE, HE WAS RE-ELECTED IN 1968 AND 1973. APPOINTED MINISTER OF HEALTH IN APRIL, 1973, PONIATOWSKI HELD THAT POST UNTIL MAY 27, 1974.

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5. PONIATOWSKI IS SOMETHING OF A SCHOLAR AND HAS PUBLISHED WORKS ON US-RUSSIAN RELATIONS OVER THE ALASKA QUESTION, ON TALLEYRAND IN THE UNITED STATES AND ON DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS. PONIATOWSKI'S INTEREST IN AMERICAN HISTORY WAS UNDOUBTEDLY STIMULATED BY THE FACT THAT ONE OF HIS FOREBEARS HAD BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF CALIFORNIA, PARTICULARLY WITH THE

CROCKER FINANCIAL INTERESTS. WE HAVE HEARD THAT
PONIATOWSKI'S PARENTS STILL LIVE AT LEAST PART OF THE
TIME IN CALIFORNIA. ONE CIVIL SERVANT WHO WORKED FOR
PONIATOWSKI RECENTLY TOLD AN EMBOFF THAT THE MINISTER IS
CURRENTLY WRITING A BOOK ON THE PROBLEM OF INTERDEPEND-
ENCY OF NATIONS.

6. "PONIA REMINDS ME A BIT OF YOUR SENATOR ERWIN OR OUR
OWN JEAN ROYER," SAID ONE PREFECT WHO KNOWS PONIATOWSKI
WELL. LONG A THORN IN THE SIDE OF THE GAULLISTS, HIS

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BOOK "CARDS ON THE TABLE" CRITICIZED THE CHABAN-DELMAS
GOVERNMENT SCANDALS. PONIATOWSKI IS AN OUTSPOKEN
DEFENDER OF INDIVIDUAL LIBERTIES AND HAS TAKEN POSITIONS

AGAINST WIRETAPPING UNRELATED TO CLEAR NATIONAL SECURITY GOALS. IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, PONIATOWSKI HAS LONG LED A CAMPAIGN TO PROHIBIT DEPUTIES FROM TAKING OUTSIDE JOBS DURING THEIR TENURE. HIS SENSE OF MORALITY HAS BECOME MORE PRONOUNCED IN RECENT YEARS, AND THERE IS A PERSISTENT RUMOR THAT HE IS COLLECTING MATERIAL FOR A BOOK ON CORRUPTION IN GOVERNMENT.

7. DESPITE HIS MASSIVE AND UNATHLETIC APPEARANCE, PONIATOWSKI IS AN EXPERT SKIER WHO, IT IS RUMORED, KEEPS PRIVATE HIS MOST DANGEROUS EXPLOITS (A PARTIAL DESCENT OF THE AIGUILLE DU MIDI) FOR FEAR OF UPSTAGING GISCARD'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MORE WIDELY-PUBLICIZED SPORTING ACHIEVEMENTS. "PONIA" IS ALSO A CHAMPIONSHIP CLASS SWIMMER. HE AND GISCARD, BEYOND THEIR 25 YEAR-OLD FRIENDSHIP AND THEIR COMMON INTERESTS, ARE LINKED BY FAMILY TIES: PONIATOWSKI IS MADAME GISCARD'S COUSIN. HE SPEAKS GOOD ENGLISH BUT PREFERS TO CONDUCT BUSINESS IN FRENCH.

IRWIN

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